



Reserving Cisco Smart Licenses for “Offline” Networking Devices

A Step-by-Step Guide written by Luke Snell





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Document Information

Document Title	Reserving Cisco Smart Licenses for “Offline” Networking Devices
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14.01.21	1.0	Luke Snell	Initial Public Release



Disclaimer

Please read this section carefully prior to utilising this document.

This document is an unofficial resource that has been created to detail how a network administrator can license, and manage the licensing of, Cisco networking equipment that cannot connect to the Internet.

The author uses a specific example with Cisco Catalyst 9000 series switches that utilise Cisco IOS-XE. This guide may not be suitable for alternate equipment.

The author recommends consulting your official Cisco Partner or Cisco Account Manager for specific licensing enquiries or raising a support case through Support Case Manager for specific licensing issues.

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Pre-Requisites

The following pre-requisites must be met before commencing with this guide:

- You possess a valid Cisco Account Login or CCO ID;
- You are entitled to managing licenses within your organisation's Cisco Virtual Account;
- You have Smart Licenses available for reservation within your organisation's Cisco Virtual Account; and
- You have administrator access to Cisco networking equipment.



The Need for Offline Licensing

Cisco Smart Licensing simplifies device license management for your Cisco networking equipment. Gone are the days where you receive a physical paper-based license or await your MSP/VAR to email license keys to you manually. Instead, licenses are automatically added to the nominated Cisco Smart Account during the equipment procurement process. Cisco Smart License capable equipment will then reach out to Cisco's licensing services on the Internet to periodically "check-in" and confirm whether entitlements and subscriptions are still valid, and alert network administrators when renewal is required.

Cisco Smart Licensing's online nature is problematic for environments where Internet connectivity poses a significant risk to the organisation or is not an option. Three specific examples include highly confidential environments (defence, research & development, "air-gapped" networks), industrial networking environments (safety system networks, process control networks, control system networks), and remote environments where an Internet connection may not be possible (water pipeline networks, geographical surveys).

The Smart License Reservation process saves the day in these scenarios. It enables you to generate a unique reservation code from your Cisco hardware, which is then used to reserve a license type and quantity from your Cisco Smart Account's inventory.



Reserving a New Smart License

Section Purpose: Outlines how to reserve a new smart license for use on an “offline” Cisco networking device.

When Would You Do This: Commissioning new equipment, or licensing existing equipment.

Step 1: Log in to [Cisco Software Central](#) and then under the License section click on the Smart Software Licensing link.

A screenshot of the Cisco Software Central interface. The main title is "License". Below it are four options: "Traditional Licensing", "Smart Software Licensing", "Enterprise Agreements", and "View My Consumption". The "Smart Software Licensing" option is highlighted with a red rectangular box around its text and description. A blue padlock icon is centered above the "License" title.

Traditional Licensing
Generate and manage PAK-based and other device licenses, including demo licenses

Smart Software Licensing
Track and manage Smart Software Licenses.

Enterprise Agreements
Generate and manage licenses from Enterprise Agreements.

View My Consumption
View all my customers based on smart accounts



Step 2: In the top toolbar, click on the Inventory section and note that a Virtual Account will be selected by default. If you wish to navigate to a different Virtual Account, then click on the current one's name. A dropdown menu will appear, which will enable you to select the desired Virtual Account.

In this example, I have selected the virtual account "ether-lab".

Cisco Software Central > Smart Software Licensing

Smart Software Licensing

ether-net

Feedback Support Help

Alerts **Inventory** Convert to Smart Licensing Reports Preferences On-Prem Accounts Activity

Virtual Account: **DEFAULT**

General Licenses Product Instances Event Log

Virtual Account

Description: This is the default virtual account created during company account creation.

Default Virtual Account: Yes

Product Instance Registration Tokens

The registration tokens below can be used to register new product instances to this virtual account.

New Token...	Token	Expiration Date	Uses	Export-Controlled	Description	Created By	Actions
	[REDACTED]						

The token will be expired when either the expiration or the maximum uses is reached

Showing 1 Record

By Name | By Tag

DEFAULT

ether-lab

[REDACTED]

★



Step 3: Verify that you have an adequate amount of licenses in your Virtual Account inventory before clicking License Reservation...

License	Billing	Purchased	In Use	Substitution	Balance	Alerts	Actions
C9300 24P DNA Advantage	Prepaid	2	1 (1 Reserved)	-	+ 1		Actions ▾
C9300 24P Network Advantage	Prepaid	2	1 (1 Reserved)	-	+ 1		Actions ▾
Prime Infrastructure 3.x, Assurance Lic.	Prepaid	2	0	-	+ 2		Actions ▾
Prime Infrastructure 3.x, Lifecycle Lic.	Prepaid	2	0	-	+ 2		Actions ▾

Showing All 4 Records

Step 4: The Smart License Reservation screen will appear, which will require a reservation request code to be entered.

Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 Enter Request Code STEP 2 Select Licenses STEP 3 Review and confirm STEP 4 Authorization Code

You can reserve licenses for product instances that cannot connect to the Internet for security reasons. You will begin by generating a Reservation Request Code from the product instance. To learn how to generate this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed.

Once you have generated the code:

- 1) Enter the Reservation Request Code below
- 2) Select the licenses to be reserved
- 3) Generate a Reservation Authorization Code
- 4) Enter the Reservation Authorization Code on the product instance to activate the features

* Reservation Request Code:

To learn how to enter this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed

Cancel Next



Step 5: Log in to the Cisco device that you wish to license, enter privileged mode, and then verify whether license reservations have been enabled with the command: show license reservation.

- If license reservation is **ENABLED** then skip to Step 7

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#show license reservation  
License reservation: DISABLED
```

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#
```

Step 6: If license reservation is **DISABLED**, then configure it by entering global configuration mode and entering the command license smart reservation. Verify it has been successfully enabled while in global configuration mode with the command do show license reservation, once confirmed drop back to privileged mode with the exit command.

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01(config)#license smart reservation  
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01(config)#do show license reservation  
License reservation: ENABLED
```

Overall status:

Active: PID:C9300-24P,SN: [REDACTED]

Reservation status: NOT INSTALLED

Export-Controlled Functionality: NOT ALLOWED



Step 7: Let's assess the options available for smart licensing:

- **all:** reservation request for ALL systems - unable to find information regarding what this is used for (to be updated)
- **local:** used to create a reservation request for the device you are currently logged onto
- **universal:** this option has been deprecated

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#license smart reservation request ?
all      Reservation request for all the systems
local    Reservation request for the active system
universal Request a universal license reservation (this option has been
               deprecated and will be removed in the future)
```

Step 8: Generate the reservation request code with the command `license smart reservation request local`.

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#license smart reservation request local
Enter this request code in the Cisco Smart Software Manager portal:
UDI: PID:C9300-24P,SN:[REDACTED]
Request code: CC-ZC9300-24P:[REDACTED]
```

Step 9: Copy the request code from Step 8 into the Smart License Reservation form from Step 4 and then click Next.

Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 Enter Request Code STEP 2 Select Licenses STEP 3 Review and confirm STEP 4 Authorization Code

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Once you have generated the code:

- 1) Enter the Reservation Request Code below
- 2) Select the licenses to be reserved
- 3) Generate a Reservation Authorization Code
- 4) Enter the Reservation Authorization Code on the product instance to activate the features

* Reservation Request Code:

To learn how to enter this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed



Step 10: Verify that the displayed device details are accurate before selecting Reserve a specific license.

Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 ✓ Enter Request Code

STEP 2 Select Licenses

STEP 3 Review and confirm

STEP 4 Authorization Code

Product Instance Details

Product Type:	C9300
UDI PID:	C9300-24P
UDI Serial Number:	[REDACTED]

Licenses to Reserve

In order to continue, ensure that you have a surplus of the licenses you want to reserve in the Virtual Account.

Reserve a specific license

Cancel Next



Step 11: Reserve the desired license(s) for the device and then click Next, review the licenses to reserve and then click "Generate Authorization Code".

- A warning prompt *may* appear on this page if the license SKU that you selected is partially fulfilled. An example of this would be a perpetual license (C9300 24P Network Advantage) has been delivered into the virtual account, but the related subscription license (C9300 24P DNA Advantage) has not. In this scenario, **DO NOT** proceed with the offline reservation process, as the perpetual license requires a subscription license to be present with the authorization code upon first activation. I have seen specific export control functionality (e.g., cryptographic functionality) fail to initialise if you "rush" the licensing process

Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 ✓		STEP 2		STEP 3		STEP 4	
Enter Request Code		Select Licenses		Review and confirm		Authorization Code	
In order to continue, ensure that you have a surplus of the licenses you want to reserve in the Virtual Account. <input checked="" type="radio"/> Reserve a specific license							
License Level 1 Supports substitution C9300 24P DNA Advantage <small>C9300-24P DNA Advantage</small>		Expires 2026-Jan-14		Purchased	Available	Reserve <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="0"/> <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="0"/>	
Level 2 C9300 24P DNA Essentials <small>C9300-24P DNA Essentials</small>		- -		0	0	<input type="text" value="0"/> <input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="0"/>	
Level 1 Supports substitution C9300 24P Network Advantage <small>C9300-24P Network Advantage</small>		-never-		2	0	<input type="text" value="1"/> <input type="text" value="0"/>	
Level 2 C9300 24P Network Essentials <small>C9300-24P Network Essentials</small>		-		0	0	<input type="text" value="0"/>	



Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 ✓ Enter Request Code
STEP 2 ✓ Select Licenses
STEP 3 Review and confirm
STEP 4 Authorization Code

Product Instance Details

Product Type:	C9300
UDI PID:	C9300-24P
UDI Serial Number:	[REDACTED]

Licenses to Reserve

License	Expires	Quantity to Reserve
Level 1		
C9300 24P DNA Advantage	2026-Jan-14	1
C9300-24P DNA Advantage		
C9300 24P Network Advantage	-never-	1
C9300-24P Network Advantage		

Cancel Back **Generate Authorization Code**

Step 12: An authorization code will be generated with the entitlements selected in Step 11, click the Download as File option.

- You can click Copy to Clipboard, but I have encountered instances where pasting the output to CLI may not work due to CLI character limitations. If you want to proceed with this option, I recommend creating a file on the device's flash from the copied text and referencing it in Step 14.

Smart License Reservation

STEP 1 ✓ Enter Request Code
STEP 2 ✓ Select Licenses
STEP 3 ✓ Review and confirm
STEP 4 Authorization Code

The Reservation Authorization Code below has been generated for this product instance.
Enter this code into the Smart Licensing settings for the product, to enable the licensed features.

Product Instance Details

Product Type:	C9300
UDI PID:	C9300-24P
UDI Serial Number:	[REDACTED]

Authorization Code:

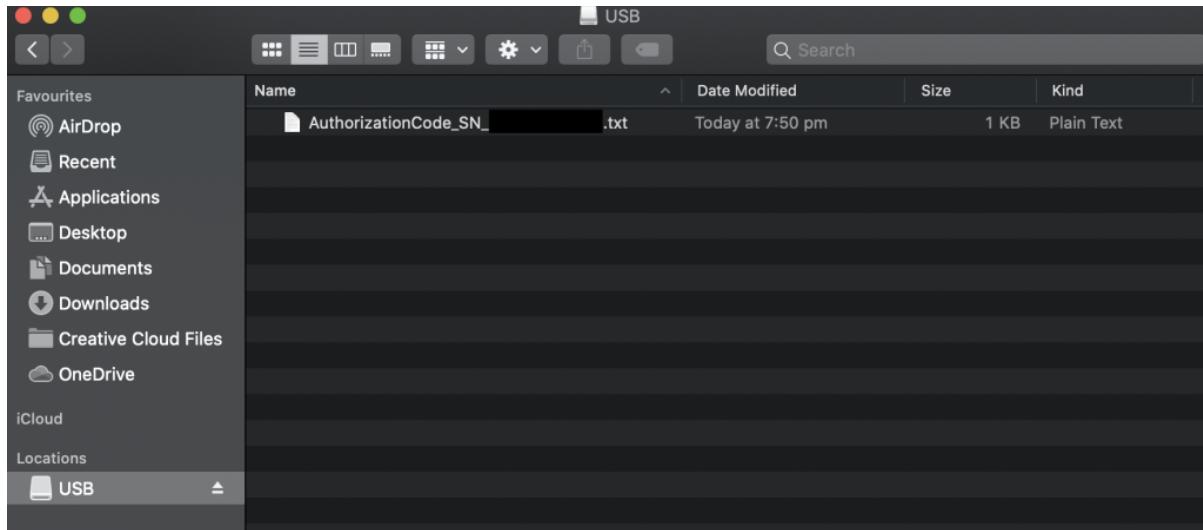
```
<specificPLR><authorizationCode><flag>A</flag><version>C</version><pid>[REDACTED]</pid><timestamp>1611921027479</timestamp><entitlements>
<entitlement><tag>regid.2017-05.com.cisco.c9300_dna_advantage,[REDACTED]</tag><count>1</count><startDate>2021-Jan-15 UTC</startDate>
<endDate>2026-Jan-14 UTC</endDate><licenseType>TERM</licenseType><displayName>C9300 24P DNA Advantage</displayName><tagDescription>C9300-24P DNA
Advantage</tagDescription><subscriptionID></subscriptionID><entitlement><tag>regid.2017-03.com.cisco.advantage9,[REDACTED]</tag>
<count>1</count><startDate></startDate><endDate></endDate><licenseType>PERPETUAL</licenseType><displayName>C9300 24P Network Advantage</displayName>
<tagDescription>C9300-24P Network Advantage</tagDescription><subscriptionID></subscriptionID><entitlement></entitlement></authorizations></authorizationCode><signature>[REDACTED]
```

To learn how to enter this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed

Download as File **Copy to Clipboard** **Close**



Step 13: Copy the downloaded file to the Cisco networking device. In this example, I use a physical USB as a means of transport. However, you could also use file transfer protocols (e.g., TFTP, FTP, etc...) in its place.



```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#
*Jan 29 11:53:23.075: %IOSD_INFRA-6-IFS_DEVICE_OIR: Device usbflash0 added
```

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#dir usbflash0:
Directory of usbflash0:/
113 drwx 16384 Jan 29 2021 19:18:40 +00:00 .Spotlight-V100
114 drwx 16384 Jan 29 2021 19:52:04 +00:00 .fsevents.d
115 drwx 16384 Jan 29 2021 19:20:50 +00:00 .Trashes
116 -rwx 1104 Jan 29 2021 19:50:36 +00:00 AuthorizationCode_SN_.txt
117 -rwx 4096 Jan 29 2021 19:52:08 +00:00 ._AuthorizationCode_SN_.txt

30749130752 bytes total (30747000832 bytes free)
```

Step 14: Install the copied file with the command `license smart reservation install file <DIRECTORY>:<file_name>`.

- In this example, the command used was `license smart reservation install file usb0:AuthorizationCode_SN_XXXXXXXXXX.txt`.
- **If the process fails, then verify that the file you copied contained the EXACT information output in Step 12 before re-attempting Step 14.**

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#sl1 file usbflash0:AuthorizationCode_SN_.txt
Reservation install file successful
Last Confirmation code UDI: PID:C9300-24P,SN: [REDACTED]
Confirmation code: [REDACTED]

ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#
*Jan 29 11:59:15.091: %SMART_LIC-6-AGENT_REG_SUCCESS: Smart Agent for Licensing Registration successful. udi PID:C9300-24P,SN: [REDACTED]
*Jan 29 11:59:15.091: %SMART_LIC-6-AUTH_RENEW_SUCCESS: Authorization renewal successful. State=authorized for udi PID:C9300-24P,SN: [REDACTED]
*Jan 29 11:59:15.092: %SMART_LIC-6-RESERVED_INSTALLED: Specific License Reservation Authorization code installed for udi PID:C9300-24P,SN: [REDACTED]
*Jan 29 11:59:16.005: %SMART_LIC-6-EXPORT_CONTROLLED: Usage of export controlled features is allowed
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#
*Jan 29 11:59:16.016: %SMART_LIC-5-SLR_IN_COMPLIANCE: The entitlement regid.2017-03.com.cisco.advantagek9, in use on this device is authorized
*Jan 29 11:59:16.016: %SMART_LIC-5-SLR_IN_COMPLIANCE: The entitlement regid.2017-05.com.cisco.c9300_dna_advantage, in use on this device is authorized
*Jan 29 11:59:16.016: %SMART_LIC-5-IN_COMPLIANCE: All entitlements and licenses in use on this device are authorized
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#
```



Step 15: Verify that the license(s) have been installed with the `show license summary` command.

```
ETHER-LAB-SDA-SW01#show license summary
Smart Licensing is ENABLED
License Reservation is ENABLED

Registration:
  Status: REGISTERED – SPECIFIC LICENSE RESERVATION
  Export-Controlled Functionality: ALLOWED

License Authorization:
  Status: AUTHORIZED – RESERVED

License Usage:
  License          Entitlement tag          Count Status
  -----
  C9300 24P Network Ad... (C9300-24 Network Advan...)    1 AUTHORIZED
  C9300 24P DNA Advantage (C9300-24 DNA Advantage)    1 AUTHORIZED
```



Updating a Smart License Reservation

Section Purpose: Outlines how to update an existing license reservation.

When Would You Do This: If you purchased an additional license or subscription post-installation, for example, if you were migrating switches from Network Essentials to Network Advantage licenses.

Step 1: Access the Smart Software Licensing portal and navigate to the Virtual Account that the device(s) licenses reside in. Click on the tab Product Instances, click the button Actions, and then click Update Reserved Licenses....

The screenshot shows the Cisco Software Central interface for Smart Software Licensing. The top navigation bar includes links for Cisco Software Central > Smart Software Licensing, ether-net (selected), Feedback, Support, and Help. Below the navigation is a search bar and a breadcrumb trail: Smart Software Licensing > Virtual Account: ether-lab. The main content area has tabs for General, Licenses, Product Instances (which is selected and highlighted in blue), and Event Log. A sub-header "Authorize License-Enforced Features..." is visible. A table lists product instances with columns for Name, Product Type, Last Contact, Alerts, and Actions. The first row shows UDI_PID:C9200L-24T-4X; UDI_SN: [REDACTED] with Product Type C9200L and Last Contact 2021-Feb-10 00:49:50 (Reserved ...). The Actions column for this row has a dropdown menu open, with the "Update Reserved Licenses..." option highlighted in red. Other options in the menu include Transfer..., Remove..., and Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product... . The second and third rows show UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED] and UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED] respectively, both with Product Type C9300 and Last Contact 2021-Jan-29 11:50:27 (Reserved ...).



Step 2: Verify that the license you wish to reserve is available for reservation and then click Next.

Update License Reservation

STEP 1 Select Licenses STEP 2 Review and confirm STEP 3 Authorization Code

Product Instance Details

Product Type:	C9200L
UDI PID:	C9200L-24T-4X
UDI Serial Number:	[REDACTED]

Licenses to Reserve

In order to continue, ensure that you have a surplus of the licenses you want to reserve in the Virtual Account.

Reserve a specific license

License	Expires	Purchased	Available	Reserve
Level 2 Supports substitution C9200L Network Essentials, 24-port license <small>C9200L Network Essentials, 24-port license</small>	-never-	1	0	<input type="text" value="1"/>
C9200L DNA Essentials, 24-port Term license <small>C9200L DNA Essentials, 24-port Term license</small>	2024-Mar-10	1	0	<input type="text" value="1"/>

Cancel **Next**

Step 3: A review and confirm prompt will appear on the next page, highlighting the licenses you are reserving. If the information is valid, then click Generate Authorization Code.

Step 4: Copy the authorization code to the device and then install it - for specific details refer to [Reserving a New Smart License Steps 13 to 15](#).



Returning a Reserved Smart License

Section Purpose: Outlines how to return an already reserved smart license to a Virtual Account license inventory.

When Would You Do This: Decommissioning or repurposing equipment

Step 1: Log in to the Cisco device that you wish to decommission/repurpose and then enter the command `license smart reservation return local`. A confirmation prompt will appear - enter `yes` to continue. **ONCE YOU ENTER "YES" THE DEVICE WILL BECOME UNLICENSED AND WILL LOSE LICENSED FUNCTIONALITY.** A reservation return code will be generated for you to use in the next step.

STOP: Do not perform this command on equipment that is still in production as it *can* be highly disruptive depending on the features you are revoking licenses for. If you are uncertain about how to proceed with planning the decommissioning of networking equipment, then contact your Cisco Partner or raise a Cisco TAC case for advice and assistance.

WARNING: Additional caution should be exercised if working with stackable technologies lest you accidentally unlicensed the entire stack!

```
ETHER-LAB-MGMT01#license smart reservation return local ?  
<cr> <cr>  
  
ETHER-LAB-MGMT01#license smart reservation return local  
This command will remove the license reservation authorization code and the device  
will transition back to the unregistered state. Some features may not function pr  
operly.  
  
Do you want to continue? [yes/no]:
```



Step 2: Access the Smart Software Licensing portal and navigate to the Virtual Account that the device(s) licenses reside in. Click on the tab Product Instances, click the button "Actions", and then click Remove...

Cisco Software Central > Smart Software Licensing

ether-net

Smart Software Licensing

Feedback Support Help

Alerts | Inventory | Convert to Smart Licensing | Reports | Preferences | On-Prem Accounts | Activity

Virtual Account: ether-lab ▾

Name	Product Type	Last Contact	Alerts	Actions
UDI_PID:C9200L-24T-4X; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9200L	2021-Feb-10 00:49:50 (Reserved ...)		Actions ▾
UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9300	2021-Jan-29 11:50:27 (Reserved ...)		Actions ▾
UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9300	2021-Jan-29 11:12:32 (Reserved ...)		Transfer... Update Reserved Licenses... Remove... Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product...

Step 3: Enter the reservation return code from Step 1 and then click Remove Product Instance. The reserved license will be deallocated and returned to your device inventory.

Remove Product Instance

To remove a Product Instance that has reserved licenses and make those licenses once again available to other Product Instances, enter in the Reservation Return Code generated by the Product Instance. If you cannot generate a Reservation Return Code, contact [Cisco Support](#)

* Reservation Return Code:

Remove Product Instance **Cancel**



Rehosting a License from a Failed Product

Section Pre-Requisites:

- You must have a valid RMA case lodged with Cisco Support to utilise this feature.

Section Purpose: Outlines how to take a license from a physically failed device that cannot have its license(s) revoked.

When Would You Do This: Typically, during your organisation's incident management process.

Step 1: Access the Smart Software Licensing portal and navigate to the Virtual Account that the device(s) licenses reside in. Click on the tab Product Instances, click the button Actions, and then click Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product...

Name	Product Type	Last Contact	Actions
UDI_PID:C9200L-24T-4X; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9200L	2021-Feb-10 00:49:50 (Reserved ...)	Actions ▾ Transfer... Update Reserved Licenses... Remove... Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product...
UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9300	2021-Jan-29 11:50:27 (Reserved ...)	
UDI_PID:C9300-24P; UDI_SN: [REDACTED]	C9300	2021-Jan-29 11:12:32 (Reserved ...)	



Step 2: Review the defective product's detail before logging in to the Cisco device that will be replacing it. Obtain the reservation request code from the replacement product - refer to the section [Reserving a New Smart License Steps 5 to 8](#) if you need assistance with this process.

Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product

STEP 1 Enter Request Code **STEP 2** Review and confirm **STEP 3** Authorization Code

Failed Product

If this product instance has failed, you can move the licenses reserved on it to another product.

Product Family: C9200L
UDI PID: C9200L-24T-4X
Serial Number: [REDACTED]
Virtual Account: ether-lab

Replacement Product

You will begin by generating a Reservation Request Code from the replacement product

* Reservation Request Code:

[Empty text input field]

To learn how to generate this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed



Step 3: Scroll down the page and complete the notes section. At a minimum, this should include your RMA/warranty claim Support Manager Case used to manage the return of the defective product. Once completed, click "Next".

If you do not include the RMA number, you will experience license compliance issues. Also, ensure that you update Cisco Support on the RMA return process progress to avoid incurring additional expenses associated with the failure to return defective products. **You can and will get billed if you abuse this process!**

Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product

STEP 1 Enter Request Code **STEP 2** Review and confirm **STEP 3** Authorization Code

You will begin by generating a Reservation Request Code from the replacement product

* Reservation Request Code:

Browse Upload

To learn how to generate this code, see the configuration guide for the product being licensed

Notes:

Used to document the product replacement (by order number, RMA number, etc...) for future reference

Look up or request an RMA number

Cancel Next

Step 4: Review that all displayed information is correct before clicking "Generate Authorization Code".

Step 5: Copy the authorization code to the device and then install it - for specific details refer to "[Reserving a New Smart License](#)" Steps 13 to 15.



Online References

Cisco

[Specific License Reservation](#)

Cisco

[Smart Licensing Guide for Access and Edge Routers](#)

Cisco

[Rehost Licenses from a Failed Product](#)

Cisco

[Smart Licensing Troubleshooting Steps and Considerations on Catalyst platforms](#)